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SUBJECT: UGANDA/DRC: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST LRA  
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Classified By: Ambassador Steven A. Browning for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Joint military operations against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are picking up momentum. The operation was extended on January 22 for another three weeks. Military and political coordination among Uganda, DRC, and southern Sudan remain strong. Senior Ugandan military officials have appealed to the UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) to provide additional logistics assistance to facilitate the rapid deployment of Congolese troops to protect civilians. The deployment of ground troops has tightened the cordon around the LRA and has led to increased engagements between the LRA and the allied forces. The UPDF reports that 100 LRA members have been killed and 45 non-combatants rescued. Some LRA commanders have contacted the UPDF and an international organization to discuss potential defection. The UPDF is proceeding cautiously, but has expressed willingness to assist potential surrenders of LRA fighters. The operation's progress has been slow, but deliberate. Deployments of ground troops near LRA locations and along borders of DRC so far appear to be preventing the LRA from escaping into Sudan. The USG should continue to support OLT. End Summary.

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ALLIANCE HOLDS FIRM  
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[1](#)2. (C) On January 23, Ugandan Chief of Defense Forces, General Aronda Nyakairima, and Foreign Minister Sam Kutesa briefed the diplomatic corps on the extension of Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT) for three additional weeks. Aronda met with his Congolese counterpart in Dungu from January 18-19. They agreed to review the operation's progress in 21 days, i.e. by February 6. General Aronda advised us that he plans to meet individually with his Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) counterparts on February 4. Military and political cooperation between the Ugandan Peoples' Defense Forces (UPDF), FARDC, and SPLA has been close and is coordinated at the Chief of Defense Staff level. The military operation represents the culmination of two years of regular meetings between the three armies. During an assessment mission to Dungu January 6-12, Kampala-based international organizations reported that the UPDF and FARDC commanders have joint morning briefings, share reports throughout the day, and plan unit movements together. The UPDF and SPLA continue working closely together along the border. Politically, President Museveni has taken the lead to keep Congolese President Kabila and President of Southern Sudan Salva Kiir informed on a regular basis. In addition, Minister of Security Amama Mbabazi also facilitates communications with DRC, southern Sudan, and Central African Republic (CAR) security officials.

[1](#)3. (C) The LRA atrocities against civilians in DRC and reported attacks in southern Sudan have not weakened the resolve of Kampala, Kinshasa, or Juba to complete the operation, according to Minister of State for International Relations Henry Okello Oryem. He told P/E Chief on January 21 that the LRA massacres have demonstrated the dangerous nature of the LRA and underscored the importance of capturing

or killing the LRA leadership. A Congolese Embassy civilian official in Kampala, Katoko Christian, and the Congolese Defense Attache told P/E Chief in early January that General Aronda, who is a close personal friend of President Kabila, provides regular briefings to both his counterpart and Kabila, in person and by phone. Combined with daily collaboration at Dungu, Uganda has built confidence among the allies in the purpose and duration of the mission that was unthinkable one year ago, according to Oryem.

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APPEAL FOR MORE HELP FROM MONUC  
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¶4. (C) Aronda has appealed to MONUC to provide more logistics support to the operation, particularly to move FARDC units quickly to prevent and deter LRA attacks on civilians. International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF also are reporting their disappointment with the minimal assistance provided by MONUC. Jeremy Haslam, IOM's Chief of Mission in Kampala, returned early from a trip to Dungu due to lack of cooperation from MONUC's Moroccan commander at Dungu. Haslam, charged with organizing the rescue and repatriation of non-combatants, stated that "it appears that MONUC is trying to make it as uncomfortable as possible at Dungu for agencies assisting the operation in order to deter them from staying too long." He also left because information about his movements was leaking to LRA leader Kony, which jeopardized attempts to rescue a group of 30-40 non-combatants that LRA second-in-command Okot Odhiambo's group had tried to send to safety.

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TIGHTENING THE NOOSE  
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¶5. (C) After the initial attack on December 14, delays in putting ground troops in and around the LRA camps prevented the allied forces from containing the LRA leadership elements. However, over the past three weeks, UPDF, FARDC, SPLA, and Central African Republic (CAR) units have been positioned along the borders with CAR, southern Sudan, and Uganda. In addition, UPDF troops have moved into ambush positions around the key LRA leadership groups.

¶6. (U) OLT's spokesman, Major Deo Aliko, said that these ground deployments have led to growing momentum in the operation. He reported that over 100 LRA fighters have been killed and 45 non-combatants rescued, 18 of which were Ugandan. The others are from DRC and CAR. He also said that in any single engagement with the LRA, ten are killed and others are captured alive. Thus far, the UPDF has lost a MiG pilot to an accident, two soldiers have been killed, and three injured.

¶7. (C) The UPDF reports that LRA patrols continue attempting to cross the border into southern Sudan and most have been repulsed. Human Rights Watch reported that one of the LRA groups believed to be led by Okot Odhiambo, an International Criminal Court (ICC) indictee, turned back from its attempts to reach CAR after two Congolese Republican Guard and UPDF units near Doruma repeatedly ambushed the group. The UPDF successfully engaged ICC indictee Dominic Ongwen on January 23, killing at least ten of his men, capturing two, rescuing 12 non-combatants, and recovering inflatable rafts used for river crossings, and solar panels used to charge satellite telephones.

¶8. (C) The UPDF reports that the LRA attacks on civilian populations in late December were diversionary in nature, aimed at pulling UPDF troops off the LRA leadership groups to allow them to escape into southern Sudan. The allied forces did not move, which may have caused LRA leader Joseph Kony to change tactics, according to Army Spokesman Felix Kulayigye. Thus far, the UPDF, FARDC, and SPLA have prevented the key LRA leaders from entering southern Sudan. However, there is an unconfirmed press report that an LRA group, possibly an LRA patrol, killed a chief in southern Sudan on January 19.

¶9. (U) The LRA appears to be saving its ammunition and its communications capacity is much diminished, according to Human Rights Watch analysts (reftels). LRA carried out attacks on civilians using axes and clubs. In Doruma and Duru, there were no shots fired during the LRA massacre of 300 civilians during Christmas festivities. In the ambush of Ongwen's group, only two of the fighters had automatic weapons. The only reports of the LRA using automatic weapons were during the attack on Faradje, and only then, they were used sparingly. HRW interviews of Congolese villagers corroborate UPDF assertions that the LRA is low on ammunition and supplies. Some LRA commanders are using local commercial cellphone networks because they lack satellite telephones.

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POTENTIAL DEFECTIONS  
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¶10. (C) Aliko also reported contact between some LRA commanders and the UPDF. These LRA commanders allegedly want to surrender. Senior Ugandan military commanders, including Aronda, BG James Mugira, and BG Patrick Kankihiro have said the UPDF would assist surrendering LRA elements. Emboffs have been following the negotiations between Odhiambo and IOM's Haslam. Odhiambo first made contact with Haslam on January 21. Haslam and the UPDF believe the caller is Odhiambo. The UPDF provided potential extraction locations and are working through a number of scenarios, including the possibility that the defection story could be a trap to allow the LRA to ambush Ugandan forces. Odhiambo told Haslam that he sustained severe stomach and leg injuries and is being carried around on a stretcher. Odhiambo claimed to Haslam that he had defied LRA leader Joseph Kony's order to come to a gathering of commanders on January 22. Odhiambo informed Haslam on January 27 that he had told an Agence France Presse (AFP) reporter about his intention to surrender. AFP later reported that Odhiambo said that "I am defecting. We have requested a safe corridor. I want to come out. I am tired of going up and down all the time." The UPDF and IOM are proceeding cautiously, but with the intention of facilitating Odhiambo's surrender, if it is genuine.

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (C) The mission statement for Operation Lightning Thunder is to capture or kill the LRA leadership and render the LRA ineffective. By that measure after six weeks, OLT has not achieved full success. The three ICC-indicted leaders (Kony, Odhiambo and Ongwen) remain, as far as we know, alive and free. Nevertheless, after an initial slow start, OLT has picked up momentum with the deployment of ground forces and increasing engagement with LRA groups. A number of fighters have been killed and the LRA has metastasized into seven to eleven groups which have been on the run since OLT commenced on December 14. The LRA has been deprived of the large and numerous caches of food and supplies it had accumulated during the two year-long peace talks. Communications capabilities have been reduced. The ability of senior leadership to exercise command and control of the LRA has been greatly diminished. Several defectors have reported that multiple LRA groups are hungry, thirsty, low on supplies and demoralized. The effectiveness of the LRA as an integrated, purposeful fighting force has been seriously diminished.

¶12. (C) The impact on civilians in LRA territory remains grave. As reflected in reftels, accurate counts of killings and abductions of civilians is impossible, but certainly in the hundreds. Between September, 2008, and the beginning of OLT, the LRA had been killing and abducting in DRC at a significant rate, in part to turn villagers hostile toward any potential LRA defectors. When OLT began, there was a significant spike in killings and abductions, culminating in the horrible Christmas slaughter of hundreds, a tactic used

by the LRA in the past to intimidate villagers. In the weeks since Christmas, however, the reports of killings and abductions have significantly diminished. We have not seen the large numbers of abductees escaping from or being freed by the LRA that we had hoped and planned for. Nevertheless, dozens of formerly abducted women and children have been freed by OLT forces, escaped or been released by the LRA and are being processed for return to their homes.

¶13. (C) One significant achievement of OLT has been the cooperation among the four governments and their militaries. Despite the inevitable occasional bruised ego, by all accounts the OLT coalition has effectively coordinated their activities, communicated their needs and exploited their relative strengths in the campaign against the LRA. There have been no reports of human rights abuses by OLT forces. We have seen no sign that the resolve or cooperation among the allied governments will weaken, although it is clear that President Kabila cannot welcome UPDF forces on his territory for an extended, indefinite period.

¶14. (C) Our assessment is that a fully successful OLT is obtainable given sufficient time and support, both of which are in short supply. UPDF requests for logistics and lift support from MONUC have not been met and Kabila most likely is unwilling to grant too many more extensions. Support among the international community will likely remain as long as the capture of the indictees and their subsequent release into the custody of the ICC remains viable and as long as there is a steady stream of successful encounters against the LRA regardless of how modest they may be. Another round of LRA atrocities will likely result in calls by advocacy NGOs for increased protection of civilians, which the three militaries cannot always provide. The troops are simply not available to ensure protection of every vulnerable village in DRC, southern Sudan, and CAR.

¶15. (C) The USG can play a positive role by continuing to press MONUC to be more supportive, by encouraging patience from Kabila, and by explaining to anxious outside observers that Operation Lightening Thunder has in fact been more effective than many perceive after its slow start. In any event, it is the best opportunity the region has had in years to eliminate the LRA threat and the USG should be as supportive as possible.

BROWNING